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"Us Fellers"

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BY B. CORY KILVERT

TEXT BY
IZOLA L.
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BILLY'S GOT A PENNY

"US FELLERS"

TEXT BY
IZOLA L. FORRESTER

PICTURES BY
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CHAPTER I

BILLY AND THE "CROWD"

"US FELLERS"

CHAPTER I

BILLY AND THE "CROWD"

"Hello, boy!"

Billy never turned his head as he heard the call. Instead, he climbed up on top of the garden gate and began to swing back and forth.

But two heads bobbed up over the other side of the fence to stare at him. One was the head of a boy with round blue eyes, and a tam o' shanter on the back of his head. Billy knew that head belonged to Douglas Tracy, but the other was strange to him. He had not known that Douglas Tracy had a sister, or that she had big brown eyes, and yellow curls tied with fluffy pink ribbons.

Twice that day Douglas had called hello to him in friendly, neighborly fashion, but

Billy had sturdily refused to answer. He felt new, and strange, and lonesome in this little country town. That very morning, when all the youngsters in the neighborhood had stood around watching the moving wagons leave the goods of Billy and his family at the yellow and brown house, he had heard Douglas say to another boy:

"He's just an old city kid, anyway. 'Us fellers' don't want him in our crowd, and anyway, Petey Johnson says he can't come in."

That settled it. He was an old city kid. Billy set his teeth, and made up his mind that he didn't want to belong to their crowd. He guessed he had his own "fellers" in town. He wished he could line them up before this country lot, and show them off. He guessed they and their old Petey Johnson would see who it was they were refusing to be friends with.

"What's your name?"

Billy turned red and began whistling carelessly.

Up at the window his mother and Aunt

Kate were putting up curtains, and Aunt Kate leaned out to smile at the Tracy children, and call:

"Be a good boy, Willie, dear, and get acquainted with your little neighbors."

Billy stared steadily at the road ahead. He wouldn't be nice to his little neighbors. He just wished he could get hold of the blue tam o' shanter of one of the little neighbors and dump it in the dust to pay him back for calling him an old city kid. Just as if city kids were not a hundred times better than all the old, round-eyed, country smarties that ever was.

Billy turned his head, and shot a look of defiance at the two heads. He would show them just as soon as his things were unpacked. Then they'd be sorry, when he wouldn't let them play with his train of cars that really went, and his wagon, and his air-gun. Then they'd all wish they had been nice to him. If only Aunt Kate and his mother would go away from the window he would say something back, but as it was, he could only scowl

and show that his feelings were hurt, and his friendship was a precious gift not to be trifled with.

But the girl with the pink side ribbons was smiling shyly at him, so Billy forgot his feelings, and swung back and forth on top of the gate as though he had been riding a circus pony. The girl smiled still more sweetly, and Billy straddled the gate, and kicked it, and hung head downwards with his knees hooked over the other side.

"I can do that," called the Tracy boy, suddenly roused.

"Dare you," flung back Bill.

The Tracy boy made a dash over the fence, skirted the space between the two houses, and stood beside the stranger from the city.

"Get off, and I'll show you."

"I don't have to get off," said Bill, tranquilly, squinting one eye at him. "It's my gate."

"I can make you get off."

"Can not."

The pink ribbons were drawing near. Billy felt happier and more at home than he had since his arrival in Fairfield.

"If Petey Johnson catches you daring 'round, and doing stunts and things, he'll make you."

"Make me what?" asked Bill, scornfully.

"Make you stop bossing things like that."

Billy laughed joyously.

"Who's afraid of your old Petey Johnson? I can lick any Petey Johnson. I ain't afraid of any of you 'fellers' down here."

"Willie, dear!"

Billy groaned, and climbed wearily down from the gate. It was Aunt Kate. She always spoiled things just like that, and called him Willie, dear. Willie, dear, and before these new kids! All the way up the path the boy in the blue tam o' shanter called after him delightedly:

"Willie, Willie, dear. Oh, Willie, dear."

Bill turned twice and threw back his challenge.

"I can lick your old Petey Johnson and you, too, and I will; see if I don't."

"You mustn't start to quarrel with the neighbors' children, Willie," said Aunt Kate, kindly, laying her hand on his head as he came up on the veranda beside her. "It isn't nice or polite to fight. You must be a good boy. Come in now, and help us get supper. Father'll be home on the 6.04 train. Do you think you can find your way to the store for sugar and butter, dear?"

"Sure I can," said Billy, gruffly. The very idea of asking a feller going on nine whether he could find his way to a store! Aunt Kate gave his head a parting pat, and laughed.

"Say 'Yes, ma'am,' Willie, when you answer, or 'Yes, auntie;' don't forget. Five pounds of sugar and a pound of the best butter, and don't go to the depot where the railroad tracks are. And hurry, Willie."

Bill trudged out of the front gate and down the road. There were not even sidewalks in this brand new suburb until you

got to the main street. The grocery store was on the main street. Billy found it safely. Inside there was a boy with a dog, and the boy sized him up scornfully and calmly. So did the dog. The boy had long pants just like a man, and suspenders, and a cap on the back of his head, and he wasn't any taller than Billy. It was galling. Even while the grocery man was doing up the sugar the boy took an apple from under his very nose and ate it, just to show Bill how well acquainted he was with the grocery man.

Bill tried to look as if he didn't care, when suddenly the grocery man called out to him, cheerily:

"Say, bubby, you folks just moved in, didn't you?"

"Yep," said Bill, loathing him on the spot. Bubby! The boy with the apple grinned and showed two teeth out in front. It enhanced the charm of his individuality and importance.

"Come here from the city, didn't you?"

"Yep."

"Live down in the yellow and brown house, don't you?"

"Yep."

"Tell your ma we'll call for orders if she wants us to."

Here was Bill's chance.

"My mother don't want any of your old stuff," he said, grandly. "She said she wouldn't trade at any little dinky country stores. She's going to buy things in the City, and my father's going to bring them on the train."

The grocery man favored Billy with a long, full glance that took his measure with far-sighted deliberation.

"You're a smart boy, my son," he said, though there was no friendliness in his tone. "But don't you come round any of these little dinky country stores any more, or you'll get chased out. We ain't hankering or pining for city trade, are we, Petey?"

Petey laughed comfortably, and swung up on top of a barrel. He reached after a hand-

ful of dried apricots that made Bill's mouth water in their golden beauty.

"I'll fix him, Hank," he said, gaily. "He's just a fresh kid."

Billy walked out of the store with a raging volcano in his heart. Fresh kid! Bubby! He clutched his sugar and butter until they nearly united forces. Never would he go into that store again. Never, when he was boss of a whole gang of fellows in this suburb, would he let that boy with the suspenders and the yellow dog share in any game or any plot of adventure. He would never speak to him again. He would throw stones at the yellow dog whenever opportunity presented itself. Fourth of July he would put a whole bunch of fire-crackers in a tin pail, and hang the bursting lot to the yellow dog's tail. He would put tick-tacks on the windows of the ill-fated house where that boy lived. He would fight him some glorious day before everybody, the girl with the pink bows on her side curls, and everybody else, and he would

leave him panting on the field of battle, and walk away quite calmly.

Suddenly from behind came a sharp yelp, and a growl. It was the yellow dog. Not far behind was Petey Johnson, and he was showing his empty gums and attracting the interest of the yellow dog to Billy's legs, his plump, half-socked legs.

"Sic 'im, Rags, sic 'im," called Petey. And Rags obeyed. Bill did not stop to argue. One cannot hold out against force of circumstances or fight fate. Therefore, he took the bare legs out of reach. But all the way down the road to the yellow and brown house the dog chased him merrily, and Petey Johnson's halloo sounded wildly.

"Run, Fatty Fraid Cat! Run, Fatty Fraid Cat!"

And from behind hedges and around vacant lot corners appeared by magic the "crowd." There was Douglas and Florence Tracy, and the Kitterly twins, who didn't look a bit alike, and the Kitterly baby, and a new girl with a

red polka-dot dress and a poke-bonnet, and another baby and another dog. And they all saw Billy running from Petey Johnson and his yellow dog, and they took up the cry most joyously.

"Run, Fatty Fraid Cat! Run, Fatty Fraid Cat!"

It was the most awful moment of Billy's life up to date. As he reached the front gate Aunt Kate appeared in the doorway, and instantly the cry ceased.

"Oh, Willie, dear, you good boy, you needn't have hurried so. Here's a penny for yourself, darling."

Billy took the penny and turned. Aunt Kate vanished into the house. And the "crowd" was silent. Billy strode down to the front gate serenely, and out into the road. Even the yellow dog looked up and wagged its tail. Billy balanced the penny, let it drop purposely and made a great show of finding it, while the "crowd" watched anxiously. Finally the girl with the pink ribbons edged nearer, and said:

"Want to know where the candy store is, Willie?"

"Yep," said Bill, carelessly. "Guess I'll spend this one now. I've got heaps in my bank, anyway!"

So back they went to the main street, Billy leading. And with grace and kindly hospitality the "crowd" showed the stranger the way to Doolittle's candy store, and waited outside until he came out with a long whip of sweet licorice. For a minute Billy hesitated, just long enough to make their mouths water and their hearts ache with remorse, then he held out the whip to Florence first.

"Take a bite," he said, cordially. "All you fellers can have one."

So was Bill taken into the "crowd" of Fairfield, and even Rags got a bite.

CHAPTER II

THE DOG-CATCHER

CHAPTER II

THE DOG-CATCHER

"Oh, Willie!"

Willie heard, but did not turn his head at once. He whistled and jumped three times over the hedge without stopping. And there was appreciative silence from the Tracy hedge.

"Willie, I know where you can get a dog."

Billy at once paid attention. He had lived in the yellow and brown house now for three weeks, and his prestige was fairly high with the "crowd," but ever since Rags had chased his half socks he had brooded vengeance. He wanted a dog, bigger than Rags, big enough to lick Rags, big enough to chase Petey Johnson.

So he paid attention, and even beamed at Florence across the hedges.

"Where can I get one?"

"Over at Elsie Hayden's."

"What kind is it?"

"Kind of white with black spots. It's an orful nice little dog. Elsie Hayden's big brother brought it down with him from their farm, and Mrs. Hayden don't like it 'cause it chases Toots, the cat."

Bill nodded approvingly. That certainly sounded promising. Rags ran whenever he caught sight of Toots' green eyes. It showed defiant courage in Elsie Hayden's big brother's dog.

"Will she give it away, or does she want to trade?" he asked.

Florence hesitated, and scraped the toe of her brown sandal shyly on the grass.

"She said she'd give it to me for keeps for nothing."

"Did she?" Billy came nearer. "What'll you take for it, Floss, if she does?"

"Will you make Petey Johnson stop calling me Broomsticks if I get it for you?"

Billy laughed. Would he? Wouldn't he smash Petey Johnson's head for him if he just dared to call Flossie Tracy Broomsticks?

Wouldn't he pitch in and pound him, though? Well, he rather guessed he would. Florence showed her dimples happily, and ran off down the road towards Elsie Hayden's house. It was the big stone one. There were lots of dogs there. Billy had seen them through the side gate, and there were kennels, too, for them. There was a whole family of bull terriers, and one of them had pink eyes. Pipes Lannigan said it was awfully lucky if you had a dog with pink eyes. It was luckier even than a cross-eyed cat, and everybody knew how lucky they were.

Pretty soon Flossie came back, and, sure enough, hugged tightly under one arm was a dog. He was a careless, confident dog. He returned Billy's stare of examination with one of equal interest, and even licked his extended hand in approval. When Billy yanked his towsled ear, he showed his teeth and growled.

"He's all right," said Bill, delightedly. "He's a regular scrapper. I'll bet he can chew Rags all up like gum."

"Elsie says his name is Fido," said Flossie. "I didn't tell her I was going to give him to you, but I asked if he was mine for keeps and she said yes, and her mother heard her, so she can't take it back. Don't you forget what you promised."

"Course not," said Billy, stoutly. "You just tell me next time he calls you that, and I'll sic my dog on him."

Fido rejoiced in the glad free life beyond the stone wall and the kennels. He raced and barked, and chased flies, and scattered chickens, and Billy stuck his hands deep in his pockets and walked with his head up, as a man should who owns a whole dog all himself. He didn't like Fido for a name. It didn't sound half as well as Rags. He perched up on the back fence for half an hour, watching Fido scare the Lannigan hens most to fits. Finally he made up his mind on a name. He would call the dog Punch. It sounded war-like, and altogether scrappy.

"Hi, Punch!" he called, jumping down.

"Where did you get the dog?" asked Ted Kitterly, as they met on the corner by the billboards.

"It's mine," said Bill. "Hi, Punch!"

"Can he lick Petey Johnson's dog? I'll bet a cookie he can't. He's got a stub tail."

"Stub-tailed dogs are daisy fighters. They hang on like bulldogs. He can chew Rags all to pieces. He's killed lots of cats and things."

"Has he?" Ted looked Punch over with new interest. "Where'd you get him?"

"Present," said Bill, carelessly. "See the dandy spots he's got on his eyes. And he's bigger than Rags, too. Yellow dogs are awful scared of cats. I wouldn't give half a cent for a yellow dog. My father wouldn't give half a cent, either. If I had a dog that was yellow I'd paint him all over—"

Billy stopped short. A sudden idea had occurred to him, but on top of it came a long-drawn cry around the corner.

"Broomsticks!" "Broomsticks!"

Petey Johnson was hurling the hated, uncourtly name at Flossie Tracy, and breaking her heart. Billy's fighting blood rose instantly at the call. At his heels ran Punch, barking, and around the corner they came full upon Petey Johnson and the rest of the "crowd" basking at ease on the place where a sidewalk was going to be some day. Just now there was only a grassy bank, where clover and daisies grew. Flossie was walking on the other side of the road, pretending she didn't care, when all the time she knew her knight was racing to the rescue.

"Smarty," she called back, haughtily, and flirted her little, short, full, starched petticoats just to show she didn't care for Petey Johnson or anything he said.

Now the ways of warfare in Boyland are varied and strange. Billy did not charge direct. He ran past Petey and grabbed his hat. This hated possession he passed on to Punch, who caught it on the bound and raced off with it madly.

"You just give me my hat, Bill Blair," shouted Peter, rising to the challenge.

"Broomsticks yourself," called Billy. "Sic 'im, Punch, sic 'im, boy."

Punch enjoyed the joke. He ran around and around the field, this side of the bill-boards and that side, just near enough to Petey to tantalize, then off again with the hat held high. Rags growled and whined, and the hair on his back rose angrily.

"You make that old dog give me back my hat, or I'll fix you, Bill Blair."

"Do it, do it," called Billy, happily. Over on the corner stood Florence, and he caught the radiance of her smile of approval from afar. "I can lick you, Petey Johnson, and my dog can lick your dog."

"He can not."

"He can, too."

"Can't."

"Can."

Petey stopped deliberately, and shut his lips. Then he took off his jacket and tossed

it to Douglas Tracy. Then he rolled up his striped blue shirt sleeves, and tightened his suspenders. This invader from the city had long since overstepped his bounds. He was trying to push Petey out as head of the "crowd," and the fact was dawning on Petey. To be sure, he had called Flossie Blair Broomsticks. She deserved it, too. Hadn't he fed her prunes, and dried apples, and white turnips, and gingersnaps from Hankey's grocery store? Hadn't he been the sole object of her smiles for weeks before this city bully had appeared on the calm, fair scene? And she had refused his dried apples and prunes. He had carried a chocolate drop around in his pocket a whole afternoon for her only a week ago, and she had tossed her head at the offering, and had said before everybody:

"I don't want your old, squashed-up chocolate drops, Petey Johnson. You can just eat them yourself."

The slight had cut him to the heart, but he had merely glowered. Next time he had

called Broomsticks after her, and it was only justice. She deserved it.

"I'll fight you, Billy Blair, or else Rags will fight your old, scraggy puppy."

Billy merely whistled to Punch. The rest of the crowd seated themselves on adjacent points of observation. Punch approached the bristling Rags with pointed, curious ears of inquiry. Rags growled and backed, pawing at the ground, as he did when he had found a grasshopper. Petey knelt, and urged him on. So did Billy back of Punch. Punch danced sideways, rolled over, recovered his balance, and charged the enemy. Rags didn't know quite what to make of such sudden battle. He tried to cuff back, but Punch had him firmly by one ear, and the two scuffled merrily in the grass. Rags began a plaintive ki-yi, half smothered, and Petey rose with flushed, excited face.

"T'ain't fair. Your old dog's bigger'n my dog. You make him quit chewing Rags."

"Didn't I say he could chew him like

gum? Didn't I say it, Ted? Didn't I, Floss?"

Billy danced jubilantly, and flung out his challenge.

"Will you ever call her Broomsticks again? Will you ever sic your dog on my bare legs, and say Fatty Fraid Cat at me? Will you, Petey Johnson?"

Petey hesitated, measuring the exact possibilities of the challenger. And suddenly there rose a new cry from where the rest of the "crowd" viewed the combat.

"Dog-catcher's a-coming!"

Around the corner, coming at a steady pace, was a wagon. Not the trim, red automobile wagon that Billy knew of old in town, but a covered wagon, without romance, only yelps within, and a wire lattice at the back to tell its fell purpose. The children stared at it in speechless dread. Florence began to cry mournfully, foreseeing the fate of Punch; but Punch was wary. The minute he caught sight of an old man rushing at him with a net he

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"THE DOG CATCHER'S COMING!"

let go of Rags' ear, and made off, without anything but personal safety in view.

But poor Rags rose from the dust, smothered, wounded, and bewildered in his puppy mind as to just what was going to happen next. The children were all crying out; Petey, his beloved boss and friend, was taking to his heels, and a funny looking old chap was making a bee line for him with a crazy, swaying, fluffy looking affair on the end of a pole. Rags decided at once that this was an interesting new game, and that he wanted to be in it. So he stood his ground while the others fled.

But Billy looked behind.

Just how it happened even he could not tell. But before that butterfly net descended over Rags' shaggy head, Billy had swooped him up under one arm, ducked wildly out of reach of the net, skirted the protecting billboard and come up with the retreating "crowd."

No one ever says thanks in Boyland; but afterwards, along in the afternoon, when Billy

was sitting on his front stoop making a cherry-stone basket, Petey came leisurely along, with Rags at his heels, and leaned over the side fence.

"Hello, Bill!"

"Hello, Petey!"

"Want some dried peaches? I've got some lump sugar, too, and four mustard pickles."

Billy got up, and opened the front gate for the first time to Petey, his foe.

"Come on in, Pete," he said, and the two sat on the stoop until the sunlight showed deep crimson beyond the pine trees down the road and Petey's private stock had given out.

But the hatchet was buried forever, and Rags and Punch lay at peace, fast asleep at the feet of their masters.

CHAPTER III

BASE-BALL AND LEMONADE

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BASE-BALL AND LEMONADE

Now, to each month in the year in Boyland's calendar is given its own special game and the practice thereof. There is the time of tops, and the time of kites, the time of marbles, and the time of base-ball, the time of rubber squeak balloons, and the time of burning fires in old tin-cans swung on the ends of poles.

It was the moon of base-ball, in July. Down the long, dusty road to Petey Johnson's grandfather's back field toiled a procession of hardy, ardent base-ball champions. Ted Kitterly was catcher, because he owned the only mitt in the crowd. Chappie Lannigan had one bat, and Billy had a brand new one. Chubby Lannigan and Douglas were just going to be fielders, and the girls were to sit under the apple-trees with the babies and do their worsted knitting over pins stuck into empty spools.

"It's my bat," said Billy, when the back field was finally reached, and the crowd were choosing up sides. "I'm going to be first."

"I'm the only feller that's got real base-ball pants on, and I have to be first," Petey spoke flatly, as one against all arguments.

"All right, but I won't give you my bat," said Billy, cheerfully shouldering his treasure and turning away.

"But it's my field," called Petey. "Ain't it my field, Chub? Ain't it, Chappie? Ain't it, Ted?"

Everybody appealed to for judgment nodded solemnly and without favor. Billy whistled carelessly, and slashed at some wayside, feathery-tipped grass with the bat. It was hot and lazy, anyway. He didn't feel like playing base ball. This time, in the city, all the kids used to take boxes—you could coax them from the groceries—and have lemonade stands at the edge of the sidewalk. It was piles of fun. All you had to do was, get a big agate kettle and some lemons and sugar and two

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CHOOSING UP SIDES

glasses, and keep filling it up with water. Then you sold lemonade to everybody. Penny a glass to grown-ups, and five pins a glass to kids. It was lots of fun.

The more Billy thought of it, the more the spirit of the missionary came upon him. He became almost docile when he let Petey take first base and hustle with the heavy bat. The score failed to interest him, and finally, after the rest of the crowd had wasted their lungs and strength and enthusiasm, and had begun to wilt under the sun of noonday, Billy unfolded his scheme.

The Kitterly house was selected as the best point of vantage from a business lookout. It was on the way to the depot and on a corner. Petey and Ted got three oatmeal boxes from Hankey's, and Billy induced Aunt Kate to hand over three preserving kettles and the sugar. Ted Kitterly and the twins brought the water—they were the smallest, and that was the hardest work—and the Tracys provided lemons. Elsie Hayden said she could get

plenty of pins; but, when she went home after them, she took them all out of her mother's dress pattern, and was punished by being kept at home; so she was out of it. Billy rambled carelessly all over his house, until his coat lining fairly bristled with pins.

When they finally opened for business it did look promising. The three wooden boxes were covered with newspapers, and the lemonade had lots of sugar in it, even if the lemons were scarce. Everybody sampled everybody else's lemonade, and pronounced it fine. All the "kids" in Fairfield congregated around the stands and stared enviously at the display. Even the doctor stopped in his automobile and bought three glasses.

"Gee," laughed Petey, clutching the doctor's payment in his moist, soiled hand. "Gee, he gave me a quarter."

Ted and Billy said nothing, but they looked at one another and stirred more sugar in their lemonade. And they bided their time. The postman came past twice, and drank

largely, but paid only ten cents. About four o'clock Ted's mother, and Billy's Aunt Kate, and the Tracys' grandmother strolled over to see how the "little ones" were getting on. The little ones beamed and swelled with pride over the praise that was fairly shoveled over them, and sold many penny glasses of freshly-watered stock.

"Now, I tell you a splendid plan, dears," said Aunt Kate, who was only twenty-eight and taught kindergarten. "Why don't you make some nice, fresh lemonade, real strong, and when all your papas come by on their way from the depot, you can sell them some, and it will be so refreshing, and such a surprise, don't you all think so?"

They all thought so. They highly approved of the idea. In fact, Petey, with his quarter and any number of pennies and pins, took on the airs and assurance of the capitalist, and went over and bought a whole dozen lemons for his own particular kettle. It was not kind, Billy thought, and he spoke to Ted about it,

and to the twins, and to Douglas, but they did not reproach Petey. They waited.

When the five-thirty-three train had passed Fairfield it left quite a number of fathers behind. Aunt Kate was right in her surmise. The sight of the fresh, cool lemonade and the happy, expectant faces appealed strongly to the home-bound fathers, and Mr. Kitterly and Mr. Lannigan both patted Billy on the head, and told him he would make a first-class business man.

Billy said nothing. Compliments were pleasant, but it was Petey's baking-powder cash drawer that was filling, not his. At last Billy decided to try competition. When Mr. Tracy came past, he announced that his lemonade was only three cents a glass. Mr. Tracy bought three glasses and handed over ten cents, refusing change.

Petey at once rose to remonstrate when Mr. Tracy had passed on. It wasn't fair to cut prices. Billy said it was fair. It was his kettle of lemonade, and he could do what he

wanted with it. While the champions argued, the Lannigan baby, Evangeline, grasped Rags firmly about the middle and stirred him into Petey's lemonade. Petey caught the familiar, half-drowned yelp, and saved Rags. The lemonade looked just the same.

Down the street came Mr. Titherington, highest prey of all. Mr. Titherington was rector at the little ivy-covered church away down on the street Elsie Hayden lived on. Mr. Titherington knew them all, and smiled delightedly when he saw the business enterprise of the three kettles.

"Mine's only three cents a glass," said Billy, casually.

"Mine's only two," hurled back his competitor.

"Well, well, bless my heart; such boys. Let me see. I shall have to be impartial, strictly impartial," laughed Mr. Titherington.

Along the street came Aunt Kate and Ted's two big sisters. "I will take a glass from each of you."

The boys said nothing, but ladled out lemonade. When the young ladies came up, more was ladled out, at Mr. Titherington's request, and then the blow fell.

"Do you know," said Aunt Kate, "I think Petey's lemonade is the best. It tastes stronger. You put too much sugar in yours, Willie, dear."

"I believe Peter's is the better of the two," exclaimed Mr. Titherington. "Peter, you may give us some more of that, if you please."

Billy's spirit rose at the cut. So did Ted's, but before either could say a word, even at the moment of Petey's triumph, Evangeline, the three-year-old, curly-haired toddler, flung out the blow that smashed the lemonade enterprise in Fairfield.

"Petey's is de best," she cried, hugging Rags to her heart, "'cause de puppy fell in his."

CHAPTER IV

TED TO THE RESCUE

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TED TO THE RESCUE

Billy Blair was getting worse than ever since his father had bought him some white mice and an Indian suit. No one but Petey dared to question his power or his given word of command. The Lannigan twins were his trusty braves, and all the girls, except Flossie Tracy, were afraid of his frown.

Floss feared nothing. She could hold a grasshopper in one hand, and never screamed when he kicked. She would stand her ground when missiles filled the air, and Petey Johnson fought Billy's faction single-handed. She would let Billy's white mice run and play tag up and down her arms, and never say a word. And she never tattled, never, even under the most terrible strain.

One afternoon, at Sunday-school, Billy had Nippy, the tamest white mouse, in his jacket pocket, and he passed it along the back of the

seat for her to pet. When Nippy had strolled out along Floss's lap, and Miss Titherington, who taught the class, had got hold of it, still Floss had not told the real owner's name, but had taken her five demerits without a murmur.

To be sure, she had had her reward. Miss Titherington had slipped the tiny captive resolutely into the pocket of her light jacket, and lo! while they all stood up for the last hymn, and her brother, Mr. Titherington, had walked by, Nippy had escaped from the pocket, and there was joy, and rioting, and clambering upon benches, and Billy grinned quite calmly and happily over at Floss; but only Nippy knew the truth.

So for Flossie the Dauntless Billy felt both secret love and outward respect. He presented to her many gifts, gifts greater than the dried fruit and pickles of Petey Johnson. He gave her a turtle, hardly as big as a silver dollar, that lived in luxury in a tomato can and would stand on its hind legs to catch cookie crumbs. Also, he gave her a pill-box

full of all the live flies he could find on his mother's mucilage-and-molasses paper fly-traps. Again, he traded a broken air gun to Ted Kitterly for a real live crawfish, and laid it at the feet of Flossie.

Once he had hidden out in the woodshed and had written on a scrap of paper the wonderful words:

"The rose is red,
The violet's blue,
Honey's sweet,
And I love you."

He had dug a hole at the southeast corner of the woodshed, and had buried the letter, and marked its grave with a cross made of pebbles. Three times he had gone to look at it before the courage came to tell Floss to look there, too. And the next day he had found an answer, so tender-sweet, so responsive, that he had walked on air all day. It was printed in Flossie's wavering, small hand:

"North, south,
East, west,
You are the one
I love the best."

What mattered it, after that avowal, what Petey Johnson said or thought! Flossie was his forever. He had even asked her, one night, out under the locust tree between their two houses, whether she was going to marry him or Petey. She had only scraped her toe shyly along the ground, and hung her head, but her eyes looked sideways at Billy the Bold, and she had whispered:

"I don't care."

So Billy walked with his head held high, and was boss of all the "crowd," except Petey. He even planned to tell his mother his secret, break it to her real carefully, some night when she took him on her lap, after he was undressed, and cuddled him up safely away from the eyes of the "crowd," and told him fairy tales. But Flossie was as fickle as she was dauntless. And one day he found her eating ginger snaps on a barrel outside Hankey's grocery store.

Bill said nothing. He walked by whistling and unseeing, but his heart broke right then

and there, and he knew he would never love again.

When he caught sight of Petey's blue shirt next time, he did not stop to parley, but let fly a stick of defiance, as though it had been a deadly tomahawk.

"You quit that, Bill Blair, or I'll fix you," called Petey.

"Dare you," shouted Billy, calmly.

"Old city kid, anyway," went on Petey, while the rest of the "fellers" gradually passed along the word of trouble and gathered, as if by sudden sorcery, from the four corners of the block. Flossie had Marguerite Isabel Jane under one arm. She had rather neglected Marguerite Isabel Jane lately, in her treasures of turtles, etc., but Elsie Hayden had a brand new dress for her doll, Agnes Rosebud, and it was not to be borne lightly. All the morning Flossie had been sewing in strict seclusion, and the result was apparent in Marguerite Isabel Jane's pink silk cloak and black velvet hat with a real white feather on it. It wasn't

all white. There was just a little yellow, but Flossie had saved it from the cage of Trill, the canary, and it gave the final touch of jauntiness to the hat.

"Who's afraid of you, Petey Johnson?" demanded Bill, as soon as he caught a glimpse of the side curls.

"You just shut right up now."

"Shut up yourself."

"My mother says it's awful for children to say shut up," put in Elsie Hayden, rebukingly. "I'm going to tell your mother on you; see if I don't, Billy Blair."

Billy did not waste words on her. Petey was strangely slow to take up his challenge. He perched on the fence and whittled away with a real knife. Bill hated that real knife of Petey's. It cut deeply into the hardest wood, and all over Fairfield had Petey Johnson cut his initials. More than that, in some places he had cut those initials intertwined with F. T., and Flossie had not cared. She had taken Elsie Hayden and Bessie Kitterly

to look at the carving, and had shown pride in the public announcement.

And suddenly, as he watched Petey whittle at the fence, Bill cast about for revenge on them both. And he saw Marguerite Isabel Jane in her new splendor.

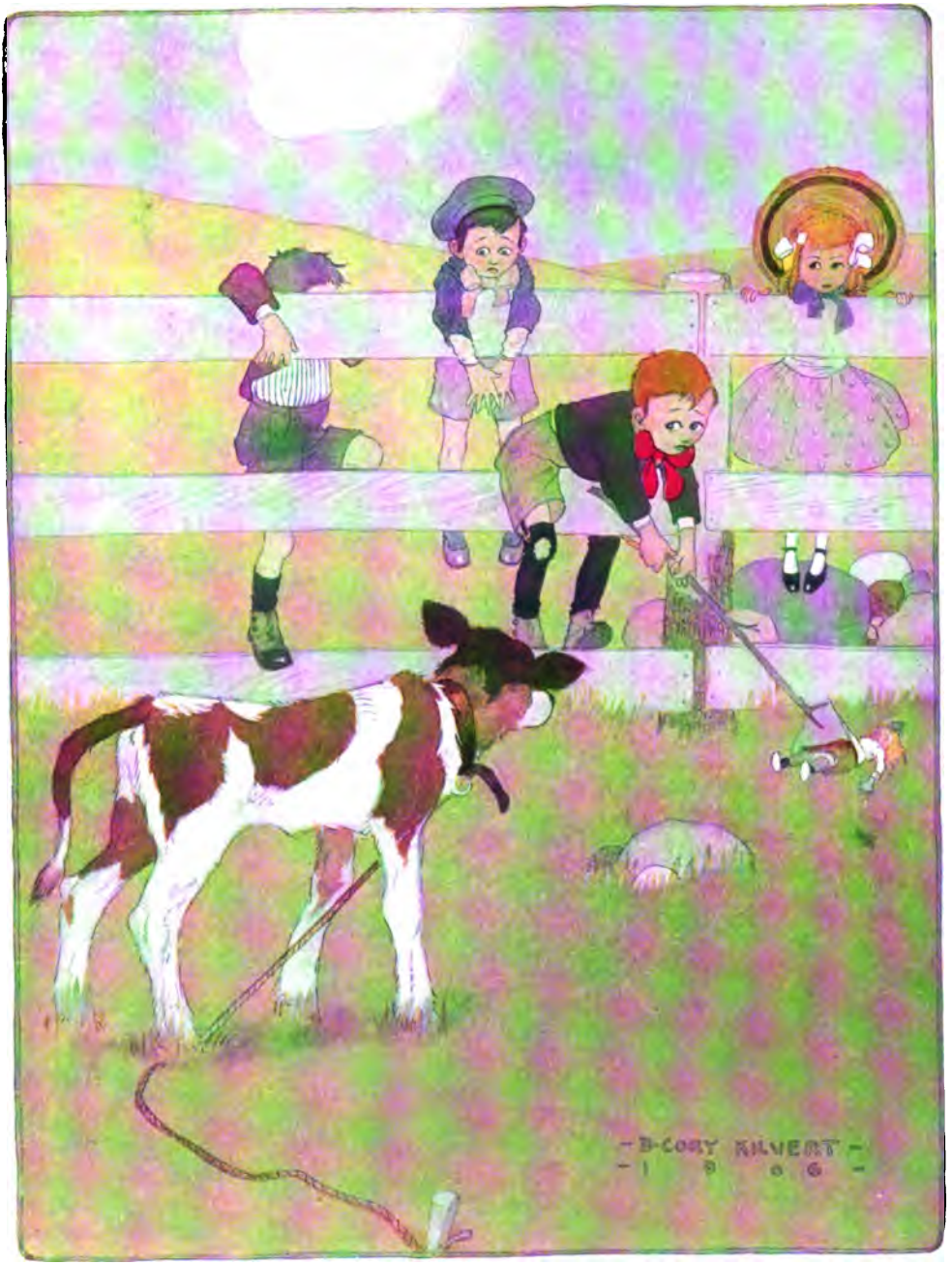
The next instant he had seized her from Flossie's hand and had dashed pell-mell down the road, with the rest in full cry after him. Petey had the lead, when, all at once, in turning a corner, he ran full into the arms of Jones, the milkman, who had been watching for him for days on a little private matter of his own. Petey had found Jones's white horse standing patiently on a side street, one day, before a house that was being repainted. It was noontime, and the painters had gone to their lunch, but they had left the paint behind, and it was red paint. The stripes of deep, rich terra-cotta had not yet faded from the sides of the white horse, and Petey was detained in his chase after Billy.

And Bill sped on and on, clear down

to the end of the road, where there was a meadow that had, so far, escaped the home-seeker. It was broad, and humpy in spots, like the real country, and there was a small, wiggling brook that laughed at itself all day long, as it ran through the meadow. But in the enclosure lurked a monster. Well did Billy know it. Often had he sat up on the board fence, at Petey's dare, and had shouted defiance at the monster; and once, when he had ventured too near, he had been chased by the monster's mother, a huge, red and white, horned terror.

So, remembering the ginger snaps and Flossie's faithlessness, Bill did not wait. Straight to the board fence he ran, and threw the body of Marguerite Isabel Jane over into the arena, to be devoured by wild beasts.

By the time the other members of the "crowd" came up, they having stopped to pick up the coat and hat, which had fallen off Marguerite, the red and white calf had shown great interest in the poor little prisoner.



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THE HERO

Flossie screamed frantically when she saw her precious darling child lying helpless on the grass, with the calf rambling towards her.

Billy was running for dear life in the direction of home. The wails of Petey Johnson as Jones, the milkman, attended to him, could be heard in the distance. Flossie was helpless and had lost both champions.

Then, Ted, Ted the mild, Ted, whose red silk tie he knew might get him into trouble, suddenly showed the spark of the hero.

"I'll get it for you, Floss," he called.

Flossie and the Lannigan twins hung over the top board of the fence on the safe side, their eyes round with fear and anticipation of Ted's instant manglement. Ted climbed the fence slowly, armed with a big stick.

The monster hesitated when it saw him, and Ted gently leaned over the fence. Cautiously, stealthily, his heart beating madly, Ted kept his eyes on the eager face of the calf and edged by degrees towards Marguerite Isabel Jane. It lay not three feet from the

calf, but suddenly, as the monster caught sight of the red tie, it veered, and shied, and leaped the end of its rope, with lowered head and flying legs.

Ted promptly stumbled, and fell flat at its mercy. But he had the doll in his arms, and before the calf could charge on him, and eat them both alive, he had crawled out of reach. Getting through the fence rails Marguerite was dropped, but Ted stuck to his point and yanked her out of danger with the end of the stick.

At last Petey was dropped limply from the avenging hand of Jones, the milkman, and Billy was carefully and diligently spanked on the back porch, in full view of the "crowd." Not because he had run away with Marguerite Isabel Jane. No, indeed. That was his crime in Boyland, but in the land of grown-ups he had frightened Mr. Kitterly's calf.

So, while the two champions received their just deserts, Ted sat enthroned between Elsie Hayden and Florence Tracy and was fed

cough drops and pink popcorn, and given the base-ball tin breastpin out of their penny prize package.

CHAPTER V

CHERRY-PICKER BILLY

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The next day Billy wouldn't speak to any of the "fellers," not even Flossie.

"Pooh! who cares?" laughed Chappie Lannigan. "Old city kid, anyhow."

"He's only going on nine, and I'm going on nine, too," said Ted, "only he's a fatty, and looks bigger."

Just then Billy came slowly around the corner. He never even glanced sideways at the crowd. His head was lowered a little, his hands stretched stiffly down at his sides, and he stared steadily down at the end of the road, where old Miss Stacey lived in the big green house.

"Say, Bill, you can't play with us fellers any more, 'cause you want to boss everything," called Chubby, just as a teaser.

Billy never said a word, but all at once the crowd found out what it was that made

his heart so top-lifty. He had on his first real pants. Real ones, store ones, not just a pair cut down from his father's old ones. These were linen pants, strictly up-to-date, and fit without a wrinkle.

For a minute the crowd stared at those new pants in helpless, foiled envy, then Petey let out a scornful laugh that broke the spell.

"Smarty, smarty short pants!" he called, and the rest of the "fellers" followed his lead merrily.

Billy set his teeth and scowled, but never said a word. They had all watched from a distance while he had been chastised the day before, and he felt that never again would he really be of any account as a leader and a hero.

So he rambled on down the road, lonesome, and a bit choky in his throat, until he came to Miss Stacey's house. And there, all at once, he saw something that made him forget all about the crowd and his short pants.

Miss Stacey's house sat far back from the

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BILLY'S FIRST NEW PAIR OF PANTS

street, and was guarded by a crimson rambler and lilac-bushes. But Miss Stacey could see beyond the lilac-bushes and rose-vines, and these July days she sat at her front windows most of the day-time, watching her precious cherry-trees.

It was the cherry-trees that made Bill feel so much better. They grew on each side of the iron gate, very close to the road, so that some of the boughs even overhung the grassy path outside. Billy climbed up on the stone wall beside the gate and looked up at the trees. He had not thought it possible for so many, many cherries to grow on trees as there were on these of Miss Stacey's. There was a twittering of robins in the branches, and Bill sighed heavily, wishing he were a robin just for a little while. Then he glanced back up the road. All the rest of the "fellers" still stood there, in an interested little group watching him. He knew they expected any minute to see him chased away. And he knew something else, too. More than anything else

in Fairfield, the crowd longed and hungered for some of Miss Stacey's cherries. One morning Pipes Lannigan had dared to "shin" up one of the trees when he left the morning paper, and before he even guessed what was going to happen Miss Stacey had set the dog and the garden hose on him. Pipes said, ruefully, he didn't mind the dog, but it wasn't playing fair to turn a hose of cold water on a feller, and he meant to give Miss Stacey all the rumpled papers after this.

But Billy was not thinking of Pipes, as he sat on the stone fence, nor of the dog or the garden hose. Last night, at supper, Aunt Kate had said:

"Poor old Miss Stacey is so worried over her cherries. They are all ready to pick, and she can't find anybody to get them down for her. She's afraid the boys and the robins will get them all this year."

Billy had said nothing, but he had stored up the information for future reference. The robins were certainly getting their share, and

the boys were simply starving for theirs. It was unfair, and a shame. And as Billy sat on the fence an idea came to him, an idea so good, and kind, and noble, that Billy almost blinked to keep back the tears when he thought what a really dandy, forgiving boy he was to the "fellers," who had treated him so shabbily.

"What's he going to do?" asked Ted, eagerly, as they saw the form of Billy slip down from the fence, open Miss Stacey's gate calmly and walk up the front path between the stately rows of peonies and rose bushes.

"Oh, just look at Billy," cried Flossie, dancing up and down in the middle of the road, with her curls bobbing excitedly. "He's going after Miss Stacey's cherries."

But "us fellers" never answered. They stood in silence, staring in speechless admiration at the fearless Billy. Only Petey murmured happily:

"Wait till she sets the hose on him and those new pants."

Miss Stacey looked over the tops of her spectacles in amazement when she saw Billy walking steadily and resolutely up her front path. She had been watching him for five minutes, and was only waiting to see him climb the trees, to let loose Major, the big dog, and attach the garden hose ready for action.

"What do you want in here, boy?" she called, severely.

Billy stopped short beside the pansy bed underneath the bay window, and took off his cap to the unseen face behind the green blinds.

"I'm Billy Blair. My Aunt Kate says you can't get anybody to pick your cherries, and—and I can climb cherry-trees."

"Oh, you can, can you?" said Miss Stacey. "And you can eat cherries, too, can't you, William?"

"Yes'm," said Billy, cheerfully. "But I won't eat any till you give me leave, honest Injun, cross my heart—hope to die—"

"Don't—don't swear, boy," Miss Stacey

cried, hastily. She was figuring quickly. One boy couldn't eat so very many cherries. Not so many as five boys or twenty robins.

"I'll give you five cents for every milk-pail you fill," she said, at last, "and when you're done you may take a milk-pail full home to your Aunt Kate."

Billy couldn't even answer. He only grinned joyously. A whole milk-pail of cherries. He knew Aunt Kate would give them to him for his very own. So he took the pail and climbed up in the first tree, as rival cherrypicker to the robins.

The crowd did not hide their wonder and admiration. They strolled down the road after curiosity could stand no more, and perched on the opposite fence to watch the wonderful Billy pick cherries.

"Throw us one, won't you, Billy?" they begged; but Billy only picked on, whistling.

"Billy, I'll give you my snapping turtle if you will," said Chappie, longingly, "the biggest one, Bill."

"Don't want it," retorted Billy, pleasantly, flipping a cherry stone at the watchers on the fence.

"Billy, can't I have just one?" pleaded Flossie, holding out her apron beneath the tree.

"Promise not to give any to the fellers?" asked Billy.

"Promise."

Billy took a good-sized handful of cherries and edged along on the limb to drop them into the apron, but all at once there was a cracking sound, and Billy's feet swung wildly in the air as the limb broke. He tried to swing up and then catch the branch overhead, but that, too, was cracking, and Flossie gave a little scream as the milk-pail upset and a shower of cherries fell on the grassy path bordering the roadway.

Billy yelled. The crowd swooped down merrily on the ruddy spoils, but Billy's troubles were purely personal. As he fell, a pointed branch caught him by the back band

of his precious new pants, and there he hung like an old bird's nest.

And at the yell Petey felt a thrill of brotherhood. After all, Billy was one of the crowd, and must have help in distress. So it happened that just as Miss Stacey came trotting down the path to see what all the noise was about, the first thing she saw was Petey up in the tree, helping Billy.

"Well, I declare," she gasped. "If this doesn't beat all I ever saw. Who are you all, and where, on earth, did you come from?"

"We're just the fellers," chorused the crowd, mildly and modestly.

"Oh," said Miss Stacey, and all at once she began to laugh. The crowd were so surprised they even stopped eating to look up at her. "Well," she said, at last, opening the gate, "I don't know but what it may as well be you as the robins. Come in, and eat all you want to. I'm just sick and tired trying to keep you out."

Billy and Petey had landed safely on the

ground, and stood with red, happy faces as the rest of the "fellers" obeyed the invitation.

"We won't eat much," said Petey, awkwardly, standing first on one bare foot, then on the other. "We'll pick them all for you; won't we, Bill?"

And Bill, taken once more into the respect and confidence of the "crowd," said sturdily:

"Yes, ma'am, we will."

So all that afternoon the crowd picked cherries, and milk-pail after milk-pail was carried to the kitchen door by Flossie and Elsie, filled to the brim. It was the best cherry picking Miss Stacey had ever had; so she said when, finally, she settled with the "crowd" and gave them all nickels and cherries, and glasses of sweet, creamy milk.

"Say, Bill," said Petey, as they all trudged home afterwards, "let's quit fighting and start doing things. It's more fun, ain't it, fellers?"

And all of "us fellers" agreed it was.

CHAPTER VI

PETEY'S SURPRISE PARTY

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"To-morrow's my birthday," said Elsie Hayden, the day after the cherry picking. "And I'm going to have a party, too."

"With ice cream and things?" asked Ted, in a real friendly, interested tone.

"It isn't for boys," said Elsie. "Mamma says it's just for girls, 'cause boys are so rough, and they won't play games gently."

"Aw, shucks," said Ted. "We wouldn't be rough. Anyhow, I guess we can have a birthday party if we want one, all our own, and we won't let any girls in either, will we, Bill?"

"No, siree bob," agreed Billy. "Who's almost got a birthday? Mine is the day after Christmas, and it's just the meanest thing, 'cause I get all my presents together just like having to gobble two dinners at once."

"My birthday's in May, and it's over," said

Flossie, "but I don't care. It's coming next year pretty soon again."

"My birthday's Fourth of July," said Chappie.

"'Tis not, Chappie Lannigan," Chubby cried. "You just made that up. It's in 'Vember."

"It's Firecracker Day," Chappie smiled happily.

"'Tisn't," said Chubby, finally. "'Cause we're twins, Chap, and you's me, and I'm you, and we are us, don't you see? And we must have just the same birthday."

Elsie and Flossie had walked away, arm in arm, whispering about the splendid time they were going to have at the party, and the twins stopped scolding at each other. Petey hadn't said a single word. He just sat up on top of the fence and whistled softly to himself.

"When's your birthday, Petey?" asked Billy, at last.

Petey put his head on one side and looked at the wind-mill he was making.

"It's to-day, I think," he returned slowly.

"To-day?"

The rest of the "fellers" stared incredulously at this youngster who could calmly sit on a fence in his old clothes and say his birthday was that very day. Why, when Billy had a birthday he wore his best suit, and a new tie, and had his hair combed over and over all day, and it was quite a wonderful occasion with the whole family. Aunt Kate never said a cross thing all day, and mamma would kiss him every once in awhile and call him her great big boy, and his father would call him "Old Man."

And here Petey just sat and whistled in his old clothes, and it was his birthday.

"How old are you, Pete?" asked Ted, doubtfully.

"Nine," said Petey.

"What did you get?" the twins put in breathlessly. It was the most delightful part of a birthday, "what you got," they thought.

"Nothing," Petey answered, calmly, but

there was a queer little tightening of his mouth, and he whistled harder than ever.

"Oh," said they, half ashamed of themselves for asking. And all the rest were silent. So was Petey. There really wasn't anything to say. It was his birthday, and he hadn't had a single present. Petey didn't mind so very much. There wasn't anyone to give him anything, or remember it was his birthday, except his mother, and she had gone visiting over to Summerdale for three days. Anyway, he didn't care. He knew he wouldn't get anything.

But the crowd couldn't see it in that light. Petey went over to help the grocery man deliver goods every morning, and as soon as he was out of sight, Ted exclaimed eagerly:

"Let's give Pete a party, just us fellers, and not let the girls in."

"A surprise party, and not tell even Petey," added the twins. "And give him something for presents."

"We could have it in the cave," said Bill, last of all.

"Us fellers" looked at one another and grinned. It was a great thought. So, after a solemn secret council, they went different ways, and Petey never knew what was happening until Douglas stopped him as he was carrying apples to the Tracy kitchen, and told him the crowd were going to the cave that afternoon, and for him to come along.

It was a secret, even from the girls, that cave. Petey had found it one day when he had been cutting cross lots down back of the Hayden's orchard. A new street was being cut through the hillside, and it had left quite a good sized gully at one side, with rocks and sumac bushes overhanging it. All the rest of the "fellers" had trotted down to take a look at the cave, and had deepened it by digging, and rounded the top so that all of them could sit inside and talk things over.

When Petey strolled up to the cave the afternoon of his birthday he wondered what was up. The twins' Fourth of July flag was stuck in the ground at the top of the cave

opening, and it looked as though the crowd had gone ahead with a surprise while he was away. He felt a little bit huffy over it, too. It wasn't fair when he couldn't get there any sooner. But when he scrambled up to the cave he peeked inside and saw the crowd sitting in council, grinning down at him.

"Come on up, Petey," called Billy.

"What you doing, anyhow?" asked Petey, crossly; then he stopped short. All at once he saw what they were doing.

It was a birthday party and he was the guest of honor.

"I brought you two of my white mice, Pete," gasped Ted, not able to hang on to the secret any longer. "And a kite string, and a red pencil that really marks red."

Petey dug his hands way down in his empty pockets, and grinned.

"Did you, Ted," he said, feebly.

"And I brought some raw onions, and some doughnuts, and my street car that won't go, but you can fix the spring, Pete," said Douglas.

"Sure I can fix it." Petey swallowed at the lump that was rising in his throat.

"We brought the flag," cried the twins, "and Pipes' grasshopper trap, and a mouth organ. And the mouth organ's brand new, too, and mamma gave us that."

Petey hitched at his suspenders, and still grinned. He had wanted a new mouth organ so much.

But Billy was last of all. He had looked over all his treasures vainly. They were all wrecked, those treasures, for Bill was not careful of anything. But at last he had hit upon two things. He had a tomato can with four turtles in water, his best four with the shiny speckled shells. Petey had turtles, but they were big snappers, and his eyes sparkled as Billy handed over the tomato can.

"Gee crickets," he said, "they are humdingers, ain't they?"

Then Bill lifted up an empty box and showed the prize present. He had told of Petey's birthday at home, and Aunt Kate had

taken a hairpin and picked the lock of his bank. Then Billy had taken all his pennies—nearly thirty-five, there were—and had bought a whole watermelon.

It was a great birthday party. They cut chunks out of the melon with an old knife, and taught the white mice some tricks, and Petey played tunes on the mouth organ. Then at last, after Billy had stood on his head seven times straight without stopping, and the twins had fired off a whole box of caps they had been saving for weeks from the Fourth of July, the crowd of "us fellers" strolled back home cross lots. And as they passed the Hayden orchard Elsie and Flossie called from the swing under the big apple tree:

"We're going to have a party with ice cream to-morrow, and we won't let you boys come."

But the crowd only grinned happily, and with secret triumph, and never said a word. They didn't care. They knew what fun one could have at a real party with no girls.

CHAPTER VII

CAPTURED BY THE INDIANS

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Pipes Lannigan, the twins' big brother, had rigged up a tent in his back-yard. Pipes was twelve years old, and carried newspapers for Mr. Slawson over at the depot stand. He got a dollar and a half a week, and had fifty cents all his own to spend for anything he wanted.

Pipes had a far-seeing and a thrifty mind. He had saved his fifty-cent pieces until he had five, and then had handed them over to Shorty Poggles with one base-ball bat and a broken fishing reel in trade for a tent.

It was a large tent. Even a full-sized soldier could have lain down in it. If he hadn't been too tall he might have sat up in it. Anyway, Pipes pitched it out at the end of the Lannigan back-yard and had told the twins they could play in it when he was at work. That meant the whole "crowd" could play in

it, too, for Pipes had a kindly heart, and knew unless he kept on the right side of the "crowd" strange vagrant breezes would swoop down suddenly and whisk away the evening paper from the front porches of his customers, to roost in some adjacent tree or fence corner.

The "crowd" looked the tent over and pronounced it good.

"It's a circus," said Petey.

"'Tis not, it's a wigwam," retorted Billy. "If it's a circus I'm going home, and I won't play with you kids any more, never. And I won't let you take a bite out of my apple next time, Petey Johnson, see if I do. And my mother's going to give me one this afternoon."

Petey utterly disregarded the threat.

"Shucks, who cares," he said. "It's a circus, ain't it, Chappie?"

The twins stood irresolute between two fires, when all at once Florence Tracy and Douglas came by.

"Oh, my, what a nice place to play house,"

said Florence. "Can Elsie and Bessie and I have it, Chappie?"

"You can *not*," roared Chappie. "It's a ship."

"Sure, it's a ship," agreed Chubby. "It's a pirate ship, and me'n Chappie's pirates, and going to kill the whole bunch."

"You cannot kill the whole bunch," said Billy. "I won't let you kill me."

"And you can't kill me, either," said Ted.

"If it's our ship, and we're the pirates, we can kill anybody we want to," the twins declared, shoulder to shoulder.

"No, siree," settled Petey, with his hands in his pockets. "You can't kill anybody unless they let you. And we won't say we're deaders, if you don't play what we want."

It was final and conclusive. The twins gave way. The tent was a wigwam. Billy went home after his Indian suit, and Petey ran to Hankey's after beets for war paint. Elsie Hayden brought two carriage robes for blankets.

"What can we do?" asked Flossie and Elsie, after they had draped the blankets around them and rolled up their hair.

"You have to carry wood. You're just squawks," said Petey.

"We are not squawks, any such thing, Petey Johnson, mean old thing," said Flossie. "We're white folks to be carried off."

"And scalped."

"I dassent be scalped," put in Elsie Hayden. "My mother says I mustn't get my hair all mussed up, 'cause she's going to take me with her for a walk this afternoon."

"You can scalp me, Petey, but don't you pull as you did last time. That's no fair."

Peter promised, and the two fair white pioneer maidens went over to the arbor, and prepared to defend themselves against the savages. Billy was chief, under promise to let Petey be chief next time. Deep in the shadows of the tent they lurked with a trusty band of braves. Beet juice and cake bluing had done their deadly work.

"Ki-yi! Ki-yi! Ki-yi!" shrieked Billy, dashing wildly from the ambush, with all the band at his heels, Rags and Punch in the rear-guard. Straight to the arbor they dashed and seized the screaming pale-faced maidens. Out from an upper story window Mrs. Lannigan's head projected all at once.

"Boys! Boys! Just you stop teasing those poor little girls; I'll tell your mother about the way you act, Willie Blair. Petey Johnson, you ought to be whaled good and plenty nine times a day. If you boys don't behave yourselves, I won't let Reginald or Gerald play with you."

Reginald and Gerald, alias Chappie and Chubby, skulked indignantly behind the arbor. The girls looked at each other and laughed.

After the window had closed Billy and Petey joined forces against the common enemy and retreated to the tent to hold council.

"It's those girls. They yell so," said Petey, disgustedly. "A feller can't have any fun when there's girls 'round."

"Wait," said Billy the general, and he meditated. Ever since the casting of Marguerite Isabel Jane to the calf he had hated dolls. "Got an old doll anywheres?"

Petey tried to read his intent in his eye. But Ted caught a glimpse of light.

"My sister's got one. It's a big one. It's all wrapped up in a pillow case in the best bedroom bureau drawer. It's wax."

Billy eyed him with approval.

"Is it?" he said, interestedly. "It would melt fine. Would she care? It ain't any fun playing Indian unless you do something that Indians really truly do for sure."

"She wouldn't care a bit," Ted exclaimed eagerly, hugging his knee. "She just hates that doll. My grandma sent it to her from way out west last Christmas, and it's so nice mamma wouldn't let her ever play with it. She only dast take it out Sundays, and hold it on her lap. She'd like to do something to it."

But Billy was wary. He knew the caprices and wayward whims of womankind.

"Don't ask her. Then it will be such a nice surprise for her when she finds it out," he said. "You go get it, Ted, and we'll fix things for it back of the tent."

After being despised for screaming the two "squawks" had wandered arm in arm over to Flossie's house to play.

The coast was clear. Before Ted got back even, Mrs. Lannigan had strolled out all dressed up for a walk.

"Be good, now, all of you," she said. "I'm going over to mothers' meeting at the chapel, and the doors are both locked. I guess you can't do any great amount of mischief out here now the girls have gone."

"No, ma'am," rose the gentle, docile chorus from the "crowd." Mrs. Lannigan passed down the street with softly trailing gown that brushed the pollen from the daisies and dandelions along the path. Not one of the crowd spoke until she was out of sight. It was too good to be true the way fortune smiled upon them.

Billy found an old broom handle in the Lannigan coal-shed, and pounded it into the ground behind the tent. Then the noble red men gathered chips and piled about the torture stake. By the time Ted got back with the doll all was ready. It was wrapped in the pillow case, and Ted, with tact and an instinct of self-preservation, had covered even this telltale white muslin with an old potato sack.

Inside the tent the "crowd" unwrapped sack and pillow case, and there lay a wax doll nearly as tall as Evangeline. Its eyes were closed, a sweet, unconscious smile of security played on its tinted face, and it wore a quaint sprigged muslin gown, with many, many tiny tucks on it put in by hand.

"She's a daisy, ain't she?" whispered Ted, delightedly. "She belonged to grandma's second cousin, or somebody awful old and dead. She's wax. You don't get waxy dolls any more. Won't she melt fine?"

She certainly did melt. The savages carried her away from her lowly log house in the

mountains, over by the side fence where the hollyhocks grew in battalions two deep. Petey had the privilege of applying the match to the pile of chips. Billy and Ted tied the waxen, smiling victim to the broomstick stake. The rest hopped around in a circle, first on one foot, then the other, with tomahawks and hatchets held high, and yelled, but yelled cautiously:

"Ki-yi! Ki-yi! Ki-yi!"

"Indians don't say ki-yi," interrupted Billy. "They say walla-walla-walla."

"They do not," cried Petey.

"They do, too."

"They do not."

"Do."

"Don't."

"Let's have it two tribes, and one can say walla-walla, and the other can say ki-yi," said Ted the peacemaker. Argument was too great a waste of time with the flames licking at the white openwork lace stockings of the white captive.

It was agreed, and the unearthly wail of the band cut the stillness of the midsummer afternoon, and its drowsy quiet. The chips went out twice, but at last blazed up quite well. The sprigged muslin proved good fuel. So did the golden curls, and the wax ran in little streamlets down into the licking flames.

The sound of the merriment proved too much for Flossie's curiosity, and she sniffed at the air.

"Let's go see what the boys are doing," she said. "I smell smoke, don't you, Else?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do," said Elsie, firmly, smoothing down her polka-dotted apron. "And if it's those boys doing things, let's tell Billy Blair's mother."

Flossie did not agree. Although she and Billy were still worlds apart she went strictly on the principle that you never could tell what might happen, so there was ever a little corner in her heart with a seat reserved for the unfaithful Bill.

"I'd just as soon tell Mrs. Lannigan, or

Mrs. Kitterly," she said, flatly. "Don't you wish Petey Johnson's mother wasn't a widow? She won't spank Petey 'cause he looks just like his poor father, and it makes her cry."

Elsie did not answer. They had turned the corner and the rear of the Lannigan yard was exposed to view. Smoke was curling up most surely from behind the arbor. Smothered yells sounded. The girls caught a glimpse of a feathered head, and a waved broom, and finally, as they crept nearer and nearer, they saw the burning prisoner at the stake, all her glory gone, only her shape proclaiming what she had been in former moments of joy and peace.

Elsie never stopped running until she had reached the chapel. It needed only the whisper of fire to start a delegation of frightened mothers pell-mell down the street towards the Lannigan home. The Indian braves had caught the warning when Elsie's polka dots went flying down the street. Swiftly the signs of savagery were destroyed. But the ashes remained,

and the charred stake, and worse than all, when the mothers arrived, besides the guilty forms that climbed the back fence and ran headlong, worse even than this, were two piteous glass eyes that yet remained in the ashes.

Florence and Elsie cried over them, and buried them carefully wrapped up in pink cotton in a jewelry box. It was all that was left of the helpless border maiden.

But for the braves who did the deed, all save Ted escaped. He caught on a nail and on his form was lavished generous payment for the wrong, and he was shut up all the remainder of the afternoon in the best bedroom, that he might meditate on his crime.

But when quiet was restored, and no cries of sudden trouble broke the stillness, through the tall grass under the best bedroom window, wriggled a snakelike form. From a fence top in the middle distance the rest of the "crowd" watched its progress, as the tall grass waved ever so lightly when it passed through. At the best bedroom window it reared up.

Hearing the soft tap on the sill, Ted's tear-wet face appeared.

"What you want, Bill?" he asked in a whisper.

Billy did not answer. It was too risky. He held up a stick of peppermint, and what they called at the candy-store, "an all-day sucker." It was a huge piece of rock-hard taffy, strawberry flavored, bound hard and fast to a wooden stick. Ted cautiously tore a small hole in the muslin mosquito netting and received the offering of sympathy and comradeship.

And until the going down of the sun did that taffy on the stick soothe the wounded feelings, and otherwise, of the gallant brave.

CHAPTER VIII

BILLY'S TRIUMPH

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Billy was not on speaking terms with the rest of the "crowd."

At least he had not been for over three hours and a half. It had been a very simple thing, too. They had all been playing in the Kitterly barn, up in the hay-loft, and Elsie Hayden had called him a cry-baby because he had yelled when a huge hen flew right up in his face from her hidden nest.

Guess anybody would yell over a thing like that. Bill did, anyway, good and plenty, and when they had all laughed at him, he just waited his chance. They were playing hide-and-go-seek. There were fine places to hide in the hay, and he showed Elsie a dandy corner. Elsie started for it headlong, because Petey was already calling, "O-U-T spells out goes she. Ready or not, you shall be caught, all around the goal or not!"

So Elsie hurried, and all at once the hay began to slide with her, and straight down, down, down she went in a regular toboggan trip, and landed right in the big coop-shaped hay receiver in front of Molly the mare's inquisitive nose.

Molly had started back to the end of her stall rope, and Elsie had screamed until all the Kitterlys came running out to see what the matter was. And the result had been absolute social oblivion for Bill. Mrs. Kitterly had sent him home before the whole crowd. At home he had been received with open arms, and spanked. After that was over Bill had sauntered forth into the world, an outcast, and had considered which he would do, run away or lie down in the middle of Main Street until some cruel wagon ran over him.

Then they would all be sorry they had been so cross to him. Then Mrs. Kitterly and Grandma Kitterly would sob at the funeral and say that Willie was a nice boy, only he had not been appreciated or understood.

Suddenly Bill stopped short. Somewhere off in the adjacent atmosphere there was a faint sound of music. It sounded almost like one of the street pianos in the real city, with its rippling, galloping, rollicking time. Bill stopped short. Petey and the crowd had gone down to the post-road after crawfish. It had been part of his bitter punishment that he had not been allowed to go too. He had seen the crowd start forth, each armed with a tin-can and a stick. But now Bill felt no envy. Here was something that he had all to himself.

He ran swiftly in the direction of the music. It came from a big vacant corner lot over the other side of the tracks. And finally, when Bill saw what was happening there, a lump came in his throat, and life seemed far too sweet to be true.

There was a real circus on that corner lot. The crowd had not expected it until afternoon, but it must have arrived in the middle of the night. Bill sat down at the border of the lot and watched it. Only a few boys had

discovered it so far, and they were big fellows from Main Street.

Two small tents were already up. Under one stood a dozen shaggy little ponies eating hay. Under the other was a long table, and some people eating. About half a dozen glittering, gayly painted wagons stood around, and, best of all, in one corner of the lot was an elephant, real, life-size, calmly eating, and near it a small baby elephant.

Bill stared at it all until he was afraid it would vanish into thin air. All at once a colored man came towards him, swinging two pails.

"Where's there a pump, kid?" he asked.

Bill's heart warmed instantly. Here was a person who knew enough to say kid, not bub, nor sonny.

"There's one back of the blacksmith shop around the corner," said Bill, hastily. "I'll show you."

Over to the pump behind the blacksmith's they went, Bill leading. On the way he got

some information. It was the Allison Brothers' Circus, Greatest Show on Earth, and it was going to favor Fairfield with its presence only for one day.

"Here, kid, carry a bucket yourself," went on the colored gentleman, affably.

That was the first bucket. Before an hour had passed Bill had lost count of the buckets of water he had carried. He didn't know ponies and baby elephants could drink so much water. But the reward was great. At the end of the hour he was well acquainted with Allison Brothers' Circus. One of the Allison Brothers had even told him he was a mighty bright kid, and the blonde lady, who drove a chariot with four horses later, sent him over to Grigsby's dry-goods store for a spool of thread and a package of gum.

After the big tent was up, and seats under it, everybody got ready for the grand parade, at twelve sharp. Bill knew that dinner was ready, but he did not go home. Nobody loved him, anyway; so, what did it matter? Nobody

really appreciated him but these circus kings and queens.

The colored gentleman, whose name was Charlie, suddenly came out of the pony tent, dressed in crimson velvet, trimmed in gold braid, with a golden turban on his head. Bill blinked and caught his breath as the Moorish marvel beckoned to him to draw near.

"Want to lead a pony?" he asked.

"Bet your life I do," gasped Bill.

"Get inside and climb into a suit, then. We're short a boy."

Bill entered the pony-tent. There were other boys there, but they were older. All of the ponies wore rosettes of gold and silver and saddles of satin and embroidered leather. On each saddle sat a little monkey dressed in a velvet riding-habit and a hat with a feather. Bill was dumb with perfect joy. He took the red satin Turkish trousers that Charlie gave him, and the little tasselled Zouave jacket, and put them on. They were too large, but what did that matter?

Then he was given a turban of yellow satin and told to lead a little black and white pony and follow the rest.

When the band began to play a lively, dancy tune Bill's heart beat fast. The ponies began to move out in single file, and he followed. He was the smallest boy of all and his pony was the smallest. Everybody laughed and said something as they went by. Even the great Allison himself, on a white horse, rode past and nodded to Bill.

"You're all there, kid," he said. "You can have a couple of seats this afternoon if you want them."

Bill was too smothered with perfect happiness to do more than nod. Right back of him was a donkey leading a funny little cart, and in that cart, not four feet from him, was the clown—the clown, the king of the whole show, all in white and red, with a funny little hat on one ear.

Down the road went the parade. First the band wagon, filled with a brass band in scarlet

and gold. Then ladies on horseback, in dresses of velvet. Then a flat car of gold, with three Japanese jugglers on it. Even from where Bill walked he could see them throwing something in the air and catching it. And then the chariots, three of them, all with beautiful lady drivers. Then the elephant, with Charlie, the Moor, riding his neck, and still a lovelier lady in the swaying hoodah on its back. That was Mrs. Allison, Bill knew. He had heard someone call her it. But the sign on the elephant said, "$10,000 Beauty!"

There was a cage of monkeys, all dressed up as firemen, and another cage of trained dogs dressed as people, and finally came the ponies, stepping high and proudly, with their pretty, curved necks and mincing steps. And, lastly, Bill and the clown.

When the parade turned into Main Street a crowd gathered. Mr. Slawson was there, and Mr. Hankey, and the postmaster came to the door of the post-office, and everybody stopped to stare. Bill felt very big.

Yet a greater triumph awaited him, and he could hardly keep from running forward to meet it. And suddenly it confronted him when he caught sight of Flossie Tracy's wide eyes and pink bows. On a corner she stood, watching the parade, and beside her was Elsie Hayden, and Ted Kitterly, and the twins, and Douglas. All, except Petey, were there to witness his glory, and he wondered where Petey could be.

Ted saw Billy first, and his mouth opened widely at the sight. Then the twins saw him and whooped with joy. Then Elsie Hayden waved quite timidly and proudly at him. But Flossie never stirred. She could only stare, with fast beating heart, and wonder why, why she had ever doubted Billy.

"Hello, Bill!" shouted Douglas.

Bill merely glanced at him, but did not answer. No one spoke in a circus parade. They were creatures of a lovelier, fairer world.

"Hi, Bill, your trouser leg's hanging down," called out Chappie, the fiendish, the envious.

"Smarty cat, smarty cat," put in Chubbie, just to help matters along.

Suddenly, as they came abreast, Flossie called out:

"Petey fell in the brook, and he's got a crab bite on his big toe, and his mother won't let him come out."

The words sank into Billy's heart. Petey, Petey was disbarred from witnessing his triumph. It was not to be borne. He didn't care whether all Fairfield envied him, he wanted Petey Johnson to see him in that velvet-and-gold Turkish suit, leading that pony.

Just then the big Allison Brother rode along the parade line.

Bill did not stop to think.

"Say, Mister Allison," he gasped, as the big white horse came alongside the little pony. "Say, are you going down Spring Street?"

"Where's Spring Street?" asked Mr. Allison, feeling generous and royal all at once.

Billy pointed out Spring Street eagerly.

"There's a boy lives down there—in the

white house—and he's sick—and he won't see the parade—"

The white horse had wheeled and had gone plunging down the line of march again, but Mr. Allison had laughed and waved his hand, and when the band wagon came to the corner of Spring Street it turned.

All the children followed the donkey-cart and the clown, and Flossie kept near the last pony. When they reached the little white cottage, where the Widow Johnson lived, Petey was at the window, sure enough.

And as the end of the parade came by, the cry went up from the "crowd."

"Petey, look at Bill! Oh, Petey, look!"

Bill grinned and looked at Petey's face. It was afire with amazement and envy. And suddenly, before all Allison Brothers' Greatest Show on Earth, Petey Johnson held out a bare, brown foot through the window, and waggled a swathed toe at Billy the Haughty.

"Who cares, Smarty?" he shouted, scornfully. "I've got a sore toe!"

CHAPTER IX

THE PONY, STARBRIGHT

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But Billy did not mind, even though a long laugh went up from paraders and spectators. It was only Petey's rage at seeing him in his glory. Who cared for his old toe!

After the parade was over, and the ponies watered all over again, Billy trudged homeward with two blue tickets clasped in his moist, tired hand. He hesitated a moment on the front porch. It was too bad that he must be spanked again, but he felt that was coming surely to the truant who had not come home to dinner.

"Hello, Billy, dear," called Aunt Kate from the kitchen. "Want some nice warm gingerbread, Willie?"

Bill wondered what the trouble was. Hot gingerbread, instead of a spanking. He approached the kitchen door with caution.

"Mother's gone over to the dressmaker's,"

went on Aunt Kate, handing over a deep golden brown square to him. "Are you going to the circus, laddie?"

Bill sat up on a chair, his feet on the rounds, and stared at her.

"I've got two tickets," he said, at last. "I earned them all myself. I carried water for the ponies, and—and I led one of them in the parade."

Aunt Kate laughed, and went over to kiss him.

"We know you did, Willie," she said, lovingly. "We know all your deeds heroic this day. And we're all very proud of our unselfish, kind-hearted boy, who didn't forget his poor little hurt playmate. Mr. Doolittle heard you ask the circus owner to take the parade past Petey Johnson's house, and we are all very proud of you, dear."

Bill drew in his breath hard and stared out of the window. What was the use of trying to make grown-up people understand anything? They all thought he really wanted Petey John-

son to have the fun of seeing that parade, and it wasn't anything of the kind. All he wanted was to show Petey Johnson that he, Bill Blair, was leading a pony in that parade. But what was the use of trying to explain?

"Can I go to the show this afternoon, Aunt Kate?" he asked.

"Indeed, you can, sweetheart, all you want to. Why don't you take Teddie or Douglas, or one of the boys with you?"

One of the boys with him! Bill got up wearily and went outdoors. It was warm and quiet. There was no one in sight. Nearly everybody in town was going to the circus.

Bill fingered his two blue tickets and rambled aimlessly over towards the Tracy house. Still there was no sign of life. Finally he drew as near to the hedge as he dared, and called at the top of his voice:

"Here, Punch; here, Punch!"

Now, Punch was securely tied up in a corner of his own woodshed, suffering penance for chasing small chicks, and Billy knew it. But

at the familiar call Flossie strolled around the side of the house and carelessly, idly slid down her cellar door.

"Hello, Floss," called Billy.

"Hello," returned Flossie, gently, without looking at the hero.

The hero drew nearer and played "catch" with the two blue tickets.

"Want to go to the circus, Floss?"

"I don't care," said Flossie.

"I've got two seats."

"You better ask Elsie Hayden."

"Why had I better ask Elsie Hayden?"

"You like her better than you do me."

"I do not."

"Yes, you do."

Bill hesitated. "All right, if you don't want to go," he said, edging away.

But Flossie turned her head and called shyly:

"Oh, Bill-ee!"

"What you want?"

"Did your mother say you could go?"

"My Aunt Kate said so, that's enough."

"Will you wait till I get my face washed and my other ribbons on?"

"Yep."

Bill waited, and, presently, forth came the fair one, with larger, pinker ribbons than ever on her side curls, and her best hat on.

When they reached the circus tent the big Allison Brother himself was taking tickets. Bill hoped he would stop and shake hands with him, but he only said:

"Hustle along there, kid, what you stopping for?"

So soon are the great forgotten. Inside the big tent Bill found himself sitting beside the lady of his heart, right down in the "frontest row of all," as Flossie said. The rest of the crowd were there, too, but with their mothers, or aunts, or grandmothers.

A big chunk of pink popcorn fell in Flossie's lap, and she looked up, and smiled on Ted in an upper seat. Chappie called out from somewhere near the top of the tent:

"Hello, Bill. How's the little pony?"

And when Mrs. Lannigan came by with Evangeline she stopped and patted Billy on the head in a way he abhored, and said, so every one could hear:

"You are a noble, unselfish little boy, Willie, to remember your poor, sick little playmate."

Bill squirmed uncomfortably, and smiled feebly up at her. Flossie giggled behind her pink popcorn.

"You just went 'round that way to show off to Petey, didn't you?" she whispered, and Bill could have clasped her in his arms then and there. She understood him. She did not think he was a nice little boy. She knew he just did it to make Petey Johnson mad.

When the ponies came by Bill pointed out his pony proudly. It was the smallest one, the little black and white fellow, that put his forefeet on a big red and blue ball and trundled it all around the ring. The clown jumped on his back, and galloped all around, singing

something about "With a hi-tiddy-ti-lul-ti-lay, hi-tiddy-ti-lul-ti-lay." When he drew near Billy he certainly met his eye, and laughed, and winked at him. Surely, he did. Bill jumped up and down on his seat to make sure he did really mean him, and the old lady sitting behind tapped his head with her parasol handle to make him keep still.

Over on one side of the ring the trained dogs were having a dreadful time with a little house that had caught on fire. And the monkey firemen had dashed to the rescue with hose-cart and hook and ladder, and were putting out the blaze.

The baby elephant sat at a table and ate a dish of ice cream, then rang a hand-bell for more. The black and white pony came on a trot with a whole basket of ice cream and served the baby elephant just like a real waiter. Billy could have hugged him for it. But, all at once, something happened. All the ponies came trooping in, with soldier caps tied on their heads, and little soldier suits on. And

they dragged a small cannon after them. Then the little black and white pony stood with drooping head and was tried by court-martial and condemned to death. So one sober, fat pony walked up to the cannon and set it off, and there was a sharp report and a flash.

Now it happened that this was a new trick and the black and white pony was not quite used to it. So when it saw the flash so near, it reared, and started on a run around the ring, and everybody jumped and somebody screamed, and one of the circus men held up a hurdle, painted, which only scared the little pony more than ever.

And just as it reached the hurdle, instead of stopping, it tried to jump over it, stumbled and fell, with one leg bent double.

Bill had not been so near to crying since the last time he was spanked that morning. He watched the men carry the little black and white pony—his pony—out of the ring, and he lost interest in the rest of the circus.

After it was over, he let Flossie go home

with Elsie Hayden and her grandmother, and he lingered near the small tents.

"Is my pony going to die?" he asked Charlie, as soon as he saw him.

"Which pony, Starbright? Sure, that pony's going to die. Got its knee all twisted. Ain't no more good for a circus pony. Mister Allison's going to have him shot after the show to-night."

"Shot!" Bill started for home, utterly wretched. Then he turned back on a run.

Mr. Allison was standing next the ticket booth, counting up.

"Say," asked Billy, breathlessly, "what—what will you take for that pony?"

"Who wants it?" asked Mr. Allison.

Bill choked, and answered desperately.

"I—I do."

"Five dollars," said Mr. Allison, briefly. "It will take twenty for a doctor, and twenty more to take care of him."

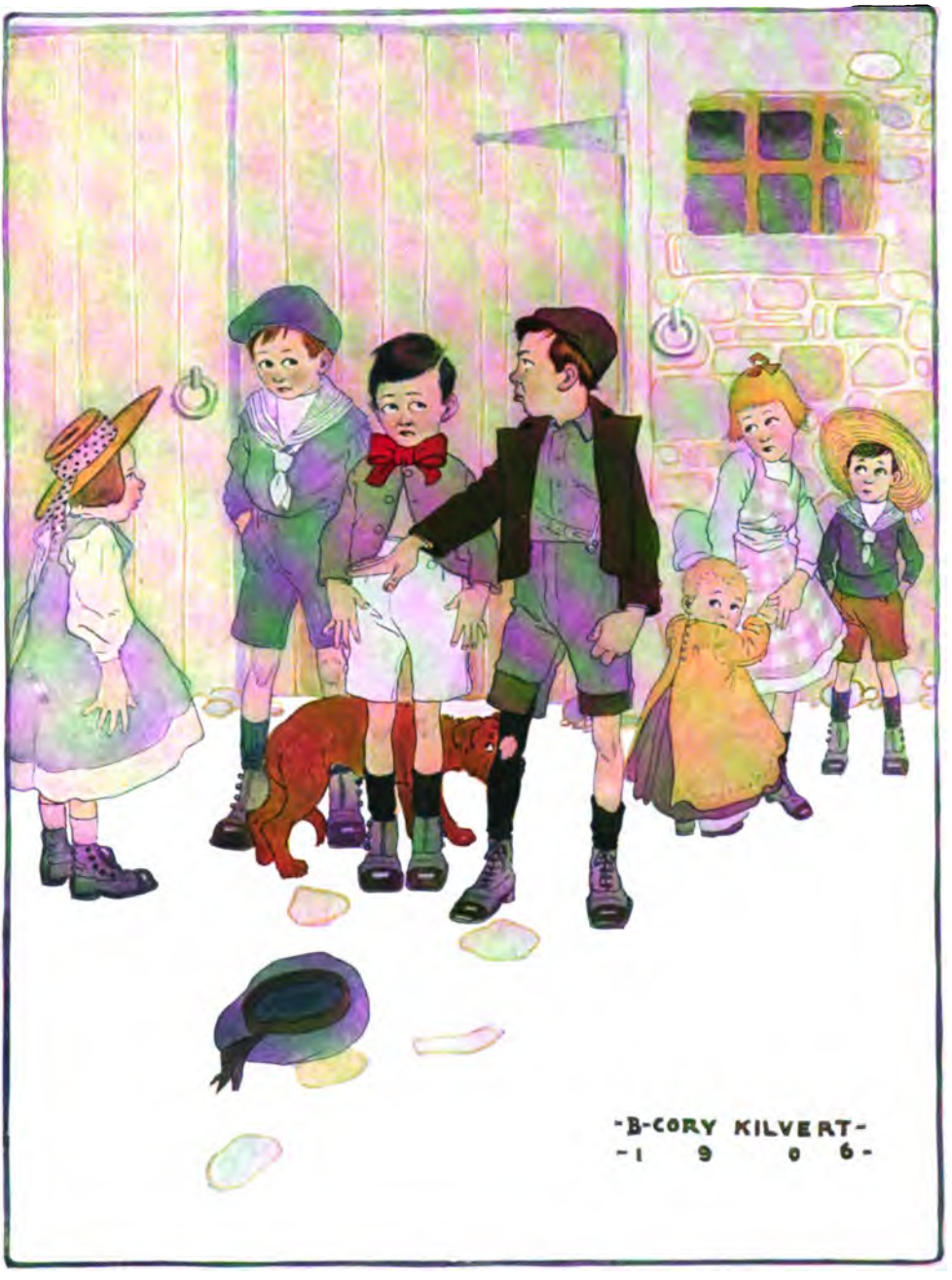
Billy went straight home. It was supper time, and his father was there. Billy told him

the whole story, and the result was one whole dollar.

Ted Kitterly got another from his grandmother. The Lannigans had a dollar in their bank, and took that, one hundred pennies in a bean bag. Mrs. Tracy laughed over the whole affair, and gave two more dollars for Flossie and Douglas. Petey was sick, and Elsie Hayden said she didn't want part of any old sick pony that you couldn't drive.

So with the five dollars, and one father along to manage the outcome, Billy and the others went over and interviewed Mr. Allison. And that night Starbright rested safely on a bed of straw in the Kitterly barn, and was most lovingly tended. Henceforth it belonged to the "crowd," one-fifth of it to each, and when the circus went away, the next morning, there was one pony missing.

Billy laid down the law as to ownership as soon as the pony was well enough to stand on its feet. It still limped a little, but it was the prettiest, gentlest little pony you ever saw,



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"PETEY JOHNSON CAN'T RIDE ON MY PART OF THE PONY"

and would nibble clover even from Evangeline's hand.

Petey Johnson and Elsie were the two tabooed ones when it came to riding the pony. The rest would have been forgiving, but Billy was boss.

"Starbright belongs just to me, and Floss, and Ted, and the twins," he said. "Petey Johnson never would let me ride his goat, and now he can't ride my part of the pony. And Elsie Hayden thinks she's too smart for anything."

Petey said nothing, but he waited, and kept an eye on the pony.

CHAPTER X

THE CONSPIRACY

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THE CONSPIRACY

"Mr. Frozeby says some boy hooks on his ice wagon and takes out pieces of ice while he's delivering at houses," remarked Mr. Blair one morning at the breakfast table. "Know anything about that, Billy?"

"Yes, sir," said Bill, encouragingly. "All us fellers hook behind."

"Well, you had better look out, all of you," laughed Mr. Blair, who was not so very many hundred years away from boyland himself. "If Frozeby catches any of you he says he'll hook you behind."

Bill forgot the threat. Hooking behind the ice wagon in its slow, stately progress around Fairfield had been an honored privilege of all the "fellers" for summers past. It was too pleasant to relinquish over an idle threat from Frozeby, the iceman. Bill dismissed it from his mind, and did not even tell the "crowd."

Half-way down the road he met Ted. Ted seemed thoughtful, and had his hands deep in his pockets, which was a hard task for Ted, as said pockets lurked in some womanly fashion under his blouse.

"How's the pony, Ted?" asked Bill, casually, merely to open conversation on a friendly basis.

"All right."

"Seen Petey lately?"

"Yep. His toe's all well."

"Bet a cookie he's awful mad about our pony."

Ted nodded, but it was not a happy nod.

"Say, Billy," he asked, after a minute. "How much of the pony do I own?"

"One-fifth," said Bill, promptly. He had the division of the pony down fine. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing, I just wanted to know," and Ted strolled away whistling in a most strange and aggravating fashion.

Bill's curiosity was slightly excited, but the sight of the ice wagon in the middle distance

served to allay it. The rest of the crowd had already gathered about it. Chappie had a huge melting lump stuck in one cheek, and could only waggle his head in friendly manner at Bill. Nothing was visible of Chubby or Douglas except their latter portions dangling from the back of the wagon over the sign marked "Danger."

Bill joined them, and handed out choice nubbles to the girls. Presently Petey Johnson came strolling by, and behind him in manner suspicious was Ted Kitterly. But Billy was too much engaged to notice.

Suddenly from a doorway issued Frozeby, and he held a pair of empty ice tongs in one hand. No one saw him coming in time to give the alarm, and he swooped down upon the "hookers" with vengeance in his eye.

Billy's short white pants tempted him, and without warning he caught him fairly around the waist as though he had been a cake of ice, and swung him on high.

Billy yelled and kicked for all the world

like a caught crab, legs and arms flying. The rest of the crowd fled, carrying their ice with them.

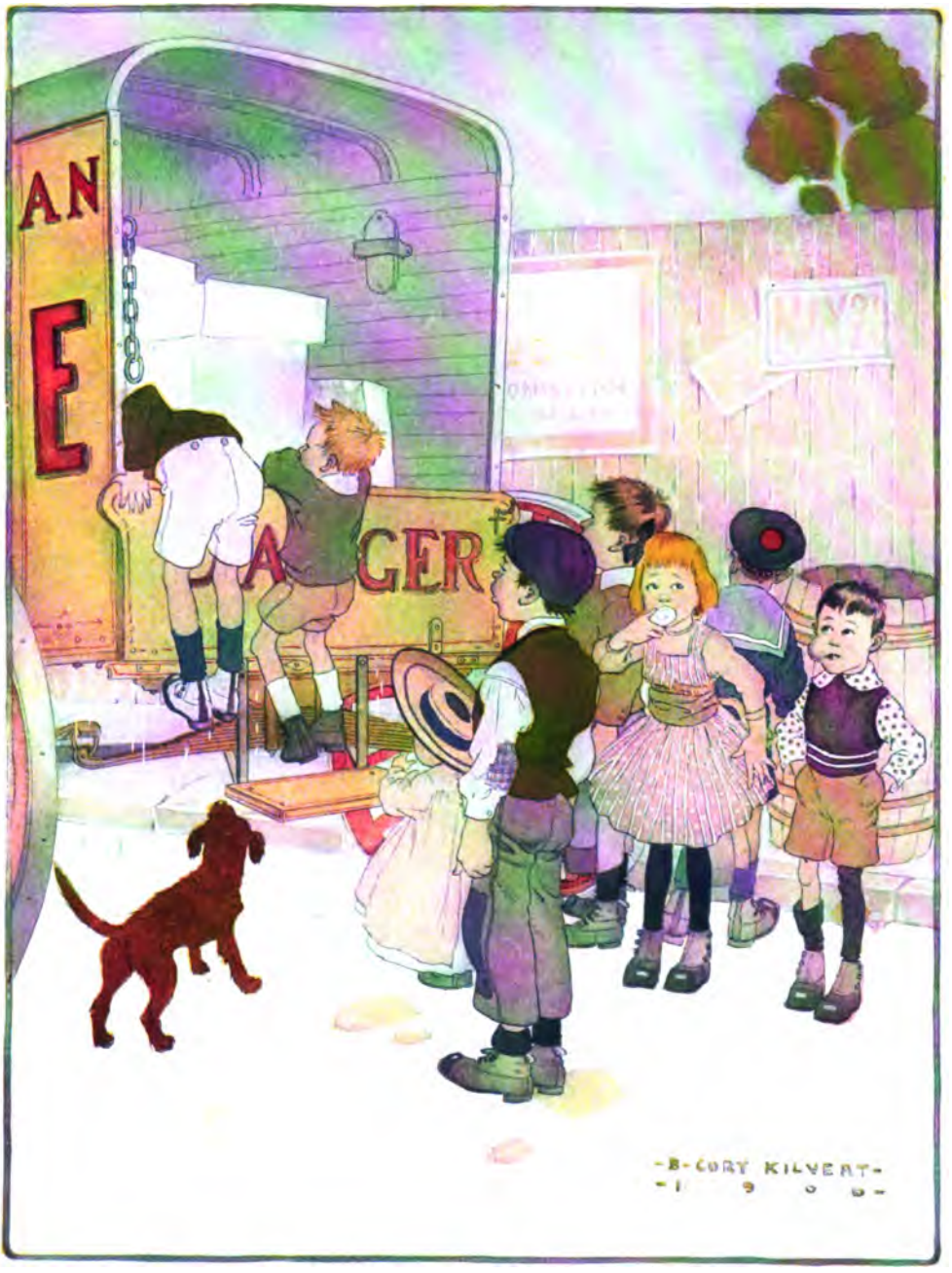
Straight to his own door the iceman bore Bill, and set him down before his mother and Aunt Kate.

"Here's one of them, Mrs. Blair," he called. "I caught him chewing ice at my wagon with the rest of the crowd. I'm going to catch every one of those boys and lock them up in my ice-house. If they like to chew ice, by jiminetty, they can chew all they want to down in the ice-house."

"Thank you for bringing him home," said Mrs. Blair, with a warm smile of gratitude. "Willie, you go upstairs and take off your clothes, and go to bed for the rest of the morning."

Bill obeyed, feeling that life was not so much fun after all.

But the rest of the "crowd" were in hiding under the Kitterly lumber pile. It made a dandy hiding-place, with the sweet-smelling



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"HOOK BEHIND!"

pine boards piled in criss-cross layers each side. And nobody could see over the top. You had to be small and a bully good climber to scale up on one side, and then down on the inside.

And in the lumber pile a conspiracy was hatching. Long and earnestly Petey talked, and earnestly Ted and the twins and Flossie and Douglas listened.

"I'll trade everything you like the best of all," Petey assured them. "I've got three dollars and eleven cents saved up in my bank. And I'll trade fair. What do you want, Ted?"

"What I said before," said Ted, slowly. "But I don't want to trade."

"A real sawmill made out of cigar boxes that will turn 'round when the water hits it?"

Ted nodded.

"One I could fix up in the brook down in the pasture, and it would really go 'round."

"Well, I'll whittle one for you, see if I don't. And you don't have to trade till you see that it goes round for sure. See? And what do you want for your trade, Chappie?"

Chappie drew in a deep breath and shut his eyes.

"A red automobile with a tooter thing on it."

"Aw, shucks, you can't have anything like that," exclaimed Petey in disgust. "It ain't fair wishing for things unless you know for sure you can get them. I'll make a wagon for you out of a big box with wheels on it, and you can play with my goat, and harness him up any time you want."

"All right," sighed Chappie.

"I want the goat," exclaimed Chubby, seeing a chance for harmony between his choice and his twin's. "Can I have your goat, Petey?"

"You can not, no such thing, Chub Lannigan, Mr. Freshie," cried Petey, hotly. "Think I'd trade a whole good goat for just a little thing like that? I'll give you three crawfish, and two 'kernicks and four glass alleys."

"Nope," said Chubby.

"And my knife."

Chubby swallowed hard. He himself had not dared to think of the knife.

"All right, Petey," he said.

There only remained Flossie and Douglas.

"I don't think it's playing fair to Billy," said Flossie, crossly.

"Didn't he throw your doll at the calf?"

"Y—yes, but he took me to the circus."

"Anyhow," said Petey, in sudden triumph, "You only own half of a fifth. Your mother only paid a dollar for you and Douglas."

"No, sir," exclaimed Chappie, "That was me an' Chub paid a dollar."

"Then you can't have all I said I'd trade," answered Petey. "I take back the knife, and you can't have the goat to play with."

Promptly, and with charming unity of spirit, the twins said they wouldn't trade at all, they didn't want to trade anyway, and it took fifteen minutes' reasoning on Petey's part, and at last, imploring entreaty, to make them come to terms.

Douglas was easy. He wanted ten cents,

five big sour pickles, and Petey's best kite. He had them all picked out, and the deal was a quick one.

Only Flossie was left, and she looked stubborn.

"It isn't fair to Billy," she kept saying.

"Well, say, Floss," said Petey at last, "if Billy says he'll trade his share, can I tell him you'll trade yours?"

Flossie thought over the proposition on all sides, and it looked safe and harmless.

"Yes, you can say that, after he's said first that he'll trade," she said. "And if I do trade, I want, let's see what I want." She turned up her eyes most aggravatingly. "I guess I want Rags."

"Rags!" gasped Petey. Such hard-hearted, deliberate cruelty! Rags, his Rags, that he had owned since he was a wobbly-legged pup!

"I like Rags," went on Floss, quite calmly. "And I always wanted him, only you were so mean you wouldn't give him to me. I want Rags, and I won't trade for anything else."

Petey stared at her long and fixedly, wondering how such deep-laid hard-heartedness could dwell in so fair a form. Then an idea struck him. She wanted Rags because she liked his owner. Of course. He began to smile faintly. After all, one had to do what girls said.

"All right, Floss," he said, quite as meekly as the twins had agreed to his terms.

So the conspiracy was ended and the "crowd" went home. All kept their own counsel, and when Billy issued forth into the bright glad world he had no idea of what lurked for him unseen.

All of the crowd seemed strangely friendly, yet they left him to himself, all except Petey.

"Say, Bill," said Petey, finally, in a careless, easy tone. "Seen Starbright yet this morning?"

Billy flashed a look of startled inquiry at him. What right had Petey Johnson to speak so of Starbright?

"No, why?"

"Oh, nothing." Petey whistled and sat up on top of the fence rail. "I was over just a little while ago."

"You were? Well, you just keep away from that barn, Petey Johnson."

"I don't have to keep away from that barn. I own more of that pony than you do."

"You do not."

"I do, too. I traded with all the fellers for their shares, and it's all mine except your share, and I'll give you two dollars for that."

Bill was speechless. That such utter faithlessness could dwell in the hearts of a "crowd." He never spoke, but turned to walk away.

"Bill, don't you care. I only did it 'cause I wanted him so much. I'll throw in my goat, too, if you say so, and won't be so mad about it. Will you, Bill?"

Bill choked and swallowed. He mustn't cry before Petey Johnson. And the two dollars and a goat did certainly sound better than one-fifth of a pony when the rest of it was owned by Petey Johnson.

"All right, Pete," he said. "But I won't speak to you again, see if I do."

At the corner he turned and flung back a final call:

"Say, you bring that goat over right away, and the two dollars."

Petey carried out his part of the bargain on strictly business principles. He paid up all his debts, goat, Rags, knife, pickles, two dollars, kite, ten cents, marbles, crawfish, cigar-box mill and the box-wagon. And when the entire transfer was made he led Starbright from the Lannigan barn to his own little barn, and that very afternoon he gave Elsie Hayden a ride on it up and down Main Street before the whole crowd of "us fellers."

Starbright had left him bankrupt, but when he stroked the silky white mane, and rubbed down the slim black legs, he could have hugged his treasure.

"You're a smart boy, Peter," said his mother, when she came out to look at the pony. "You're just like your father. He'd

trade an old gray mule for Adam's ox, and get the best of the bargain. You're a wonderful comfort to me, Petey."

And Petey laughed and hugged the circus pony that was all his very own.

CHAPTER XI

"GOOD-BYE, FELLERS"

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"GOOD-BYE, FELLERS"

August was beginning to look tired and dusty.

Over at the big brick schoolhouse there was a start and a stir, and general signs of life.

In the Blair house were also signs, and Billy helped to take down curtains.

"Well, I'll be glad to get back to the city," said Mrs. Blair, thankfully. "I never did like these little half and half places. Next summer we'll go to the real country, Willie, dear."

Willie dear said nothing. But somehow when he had finished helping and had strolled out of the bare-looking house he felt lonely. He was going back to the city in the morning, going to leave the rest of "us fellers." He didn't feel happy, someway.

"I'll be in second reader this year, Billy," said Flossie Tracy, as he came by.

"Who cares," retorted Bill, ungraciously. But Flossie knew the ways of mankind. She knew that a harsh tone oft hid a breaking heart, and she put down the beads she was stringing, fixed her pink bows straight, and went down to walk beside Bill.

"Is it nice where you live in the city?" she asked.

"You bet it's nice. There's all kinds of things you don't have here. I wouldn't live in your old country for anything."

"Yes, you would, Billy. You just say that 'cause you think you're smart," said Flossie, tenderly. "I'm awful sorry you're going away."

"I'll bet a cookie Petey Johnson's glad."

Floss was silent.

"He just thinks he's everybody going 'round on that pony. And you gave back Rags, too, didn't you? I saw him with Petey yesterday."

Flossie hung her head shyly.

"I traded him back."

"What for?" Billy instantly demanded.

"My share in the pony, so Elsie Hayden couldn't ride on it."

"Oh!" Bill's tone was eloquent, yet he looked at Flossie in admiration. Certainly girls were smarter than boys. He never would have thought of such a thing.

"Pooh! who cares?" he said. "I can ride on heaps of ponies at the park where I live. Say, Floss."

"Well, Billy," very softly.

"Floss, will you give me something 'cause I'm going away?"

"What you want?" still more softly.

Bill gathered up all his courage. He needed it. He stared at the fluffy, nodding yellow curls and spoke his heart's desire.

"Give me a lock of your hair, Floss?"

Flossie flushed to the very roots of that said hair. Never had she given any boy a lock of her hair. Never had any boy asked for a lock of her hair. It was altogether new and delicious.

"I—I dassent cut it," she whispered faintly.

"Just a teeny, weenty, little bit, Floss. It wouldn't show if you kind of took it underneath."

Oh, the voice of the tempter. Flossie held out for fully six minutes, then at last she promised that the next morning, before Billy left, she would surely hand him over a lock of her hair to remember her by.

To remember her by! Oh, meaningless words! What on earth did Billy want with a lock of hair to keep that lovely, witching image ever fresh in his heart? But he wanted it all the same, and the knowledge that she had promised it to him kept him light-hearted and buoyant all the afternoon.

But Flossie was having her own trouble in the matter. Every curl went just so, and knew its own way of turning. Not a lock could she find but would be missed most surely when her mother combed them over her finger the next morning. So Florence worried and planned, and went over to Bessie Kitterly's

house to ask her about it. But Bessie was horrified, and threatened to tell her mother right away, so Flossie said she'd never speak to her again, and she went sadly back home with the curl still attached to her head.

She didn't dare to ask Elsie Hayden. She hadn't spoken to Elsie Hayden for a whole day. It was really dreadful. She climbed up on a chair in her nightgown that night and tried to find a stray lock, but her mother came in the room and asked her what on earth she was up to now, so, of course, Flossie had to give it up and snuggle down in her bed.

The next morning, even while the moving vans were at the door, Billy was up and out of doors. Carelessly he chatted with the members of the "crowd" who sat in a row along the side fence. Cordially he spoke to Petey Johnson even, and wished him well.

"There's an orful big crowd of us fellers in the city," he said. "'Bout fifty, I s'pose. I'll be glad to get back."

Petey said nothing, but he nodded his

head. He quite agreed with Billy. He, too, was glad to have him get back.

And at last Bill spied what he was waiting for. Flossie Tracy had come out of her house and was standing irresolutely on the front steps. Bill at once began to talk about the weather, and the old gray horse on one wagon, and the fire engines they had in the city.

Flossie edged nearer. There were no large packages apparent about her, but Bill thought at once it might be a very small curl.

At last the moment came. Aunt Kate came down the walk, his mother was shaking hands with Mrs. Tracy, and some one was locking the front door. Still Flossie made no move.

"Good-bye, fellers," said Billy, carelessly, pretending not to look at the fair, false one.

"Good-bye, Bill," yelled the crowd. "Come next year."

"Yep," said Bill, but there was a lump in his throat. How could she, oh, how could she do such a thing after yesterday! But suddenly,

as he trudged wearily after Aunt Kate, carrying a bird-cage and a flower-pot, he heard her call him. She was running after him, her face flushed, her curls flying.

"Oh, Bill-ee."

Bill stopped short.

"I—I just wanted to give you this," she said, and squeezed into his hand a tiny paper folded carefully. "Don't you tell, now, Bill Blair."

"Sure I won't," promised Bill. "Cross my heart, hope to die."

"All right. Good-bye, Billy."

That was all. She was gone, and they were calling him to hurry up. Aunt Kate was afraid he might drop the flower-pot. Drop it? He would have liked to smash it to eleven hundred pieces and cast the canary among them. But he went on, and in his pocket rested a small yellow curl tied with a tiny pink ribbon.

"I'm going to tell your mother, Florence," said Elsie, with a triumphant stare, when she came back. "I know what you did then."

"What did I do?" demanded Florence, and if there were tears in her eyes she didn't care. "What did I do, smarty?"

"You gave Billy Blair a lock of your hair. I saw you tie the ribbon on it out back of your house this morning."

Flossie turned up her small nose scornfully, and swept into the house.

"Did you cut your hair, girlie?" asked her mother, a trifle seriously, as she raised her in her arms. "Tell mother, Flossie. Did you cut your pretty curls?"

Flossie hid her face in her mother's neck. To no one else would she tell her secret, not even to Bill, above all, not to Bill.

"It wasn't really truly hair, mamma," she whispered, sobbingly. "Billy wanted some, so I gave him a lock of Marguerite Isabel Jane's."

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